

Redeemer College's Poetry and Fiction Magazine  
volume 7, spring 1997

# The Minstrel

Redeemer College's Poetry and Fiction Magazine

Volume 7, Spring 1997

"Ring out the want, the eare, the sin,  
The faithless coldness of the times;  
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes,  
But ring the fuller minstrel in."

Tennyson

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**Cover Art: *I Wash My Hands Of It*, by Brenda Dykstra**

## The Morning

There is a cathedral sacredness  
in dawn's sacrament, an orchestration  
in the open stillness,  
yet a symphony of silence.  
In the vibrant murkiness  
the shadowy willows,  
arrayed in silken livery,  
attend night's benedict.  
While scattering their blushing leaf,  
the garlands usher in  
the white bride ghost of morning  
who, with veil of milky teardrop,  
haunts the earthen aisle.  
from airy rostrum,  
the pulsating orb of cardinal fire  
proclaims the benediction.  
The dusken embrace of dawn  
lifts the veil of mist  
to celebrate the ceremonious  
marriage of the morning.

*Marcia Elgersma*

## The Sunday of Orthodoxy

Old black coat  
Woolen and worn with a stench  
Of garlic over garlic.  
The wooden pew recognises  
Every crevice of your shape  
As it knows its own  
Cracked and coated veneer.  
You have been here  
In the light and darkness.

Old black hat  
Rises out of dense clouds  
Of sweet incense  
And smoking candle.  
The lights of those before you  
Cast shadows of colour  
And shine  
With modest brilliance  
Upon your simple head.





Old dark face  
Lifted humble high  
Into the heavy air,  
Your eyes wet with baptism  
That pour from the icons  
Who tell the story;  
This steadfast story  
That has kept you here  
A disciple, a follower,  
Brother, father,  
Lover  
Has led me here,  
A stranger  
Who has known you forever.

—Jane Hogeterp

### Untitled

The peonies shake their pompons  
thanking the wind for the chance  
to dance. While I lounge in  
the hammock, I admire those brave  
and cheerful peonies, their scarlet  
vivacity, their crimson glory,  
how they nod and laugh in the breeze.  
There they grow in the middle of the emerald  
lawn, so brave and bold and brazen.

Somewhere above me Sammy Bluejay  
squawks unpleasantly and I peer  
up among the pine needles  
of the two trees which carry my hammock  
like the two unlucky girls at recess  
assigned to the skipping rope ends.  
Yes, there's old Sammy, blue and loud as ever.

The association between summer  
and childhood is strong; hair  
flying in the wind, exploring  
corners in the yard, searching  
for treasures along the fence lines,  
the smell of clover and trefoil  
blown across the fields, hide and seek  
among the hay stooks, the red painted  
swing set, the swimming pool,  
my brother and I being Superman--



holding our towels high and running  
around the house, racing our bikes  
around the manure pile at milking time--  
him as Rosco and me as Bo or  
Luke Duke, our rock collections are  
the end of the lane, dragging  
our heavy and stiff cat off the road,  
desperately trying to understand,  
and not to cry.

Among the sounds of crickets, the drone  
of a bee and a distant haybine,  
the song of a single robin is somewhere  
close by; it starts and stops and starts  
again. I feel no need to open  
my eyes or find it; it sounds like  
the echo of the child's voice,  
a sure thing, a lasting thing.

—Tracey Buys

### to old friends and editors

disillusioned me  
    I wander  
        wonder  
in a hopeless wood  
you watch  
above the blackened trees  
    in a purple sky  
from a mighty zeppelin

a damned doctor  
killed my child  
with the knife  
of circumcision

disillusioned me  
the wind is fire  
burns my face away  
I'm finally naked  
    and  
I see you look at me  
    through icy pools  
a million miles away

—Kai Groen





## Through my Eyes

We lie here making snow angels  
in the dark night;  
above, we see stars faintly,  
behind the clouds.

Some would find meaning  
in simple observation,  
but I am less a poet  
than a dreamer with a pen.

—*Jeannette Sandink*

## untitled

The seven o'clock  
light  
slants  
like Emily Dickinson's truth  
between the houserows  
making everything  
oddly beautiful.

It's strange, light at eye-level  
as though all is darkness  
above my head.  
Even the bugs cast shadows.

And the grass  
on the side of the highway  
filters the light like  
beer  
through  
charcoal

leaving the ditch  
golden full  
of  
whiskey.

—*Andrea VanderKooij*

**Exp./ 96 NOV 01**

The day he said he loved me  
I cried; bud passion bloomed  
softly, scarlet like the peonies  
I grew under the kitchen window,  
and though I never knew when  
the flowers died, I watched his  
love for me turn rancid--a  
stench like forgotten butter  
in a fridge of chilled memories,  
where he must have kept what  
poisoned me. When I expired  
he cleaned it out--replaced  
the old with new stock--fresh  
products give him pleasure;  
I watch him savour them like  
a wine-taster who swirls the  
liquid in his mouth then spits,  
already grasping a new glass.  
If he could feel me now,  
it would be my icy fingers  
wrapped around his kissed  
neck, and after I revelled  
in his humiliating, undignified demise,  
I would unplug his fridge and  
put him in it to rot, marked forever  
on his sallow forehead with  
an expiry date from months before.

—*Stephanie Cilia*

### **Room in the Attic**

Shafts of sunlight filter through faded folds of lace.  
Reflected particles of dust swirl through the air.  
Dust lies thick on the wooden window frame;  
It blankets the floor, revealing the footsteps of all who have  
Entered.

—*Caroline Kralt*







## **mem**

I caught you floating away  
with my memory  
flitting around on some hill  
I gave you a piece to chew on  
you bit off more  
said you could handle it  
but it was my memory  
and it exploded in your mind  
soon you realised that you  
could not really be a part of  
every little bit  
I sort of bit my lip  
and made a mental note not to let you  
sample as much the next time

—*Tim Lyon*

## **Aquarium**

You swim inside your glass bubble;  
I look at you with a magnified eye  
and study your skin that looks like  
a slippery golden slide, like the one  
I used to play on in my youth.  
I remember the day I found you;  
you had stolen away from your school  
to explore your large green world  
with those innocent eyes.  
But I, scooping you into my mesh ladle,  
out of your swampy-souped dwelling,  
gave you a new place--  
a windowed palace carpeted in crystal,  
ornamented with sparkling gems--  
a ballroom to dart and dance among  
exotic plants, to parade your  
coat of gold, swishing your royal fans.

You press your nose against the pane,  
staring at me blankly, sadly  
through pupils now dried up like mud  
splotted on misty glass,  
methodically mouthing the word  
you have been for years:  
Home...Home...Home....

—*Julia Dam*

## University Poem

*Yet such is the bitter specimen of the fruit of that ambitious system which has of late years been making way among us; for its result on ordinary minds, and on the common rule of students, is less satisfactory still; they leave their place of education simply dissipated and relaxed by the multiplicity of subjects, which they have never really mastered, and so shallow as not even to know their shallowness.*

-John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 1852.

so  
now  
that  
you  
know  
    everything  
that  
there  
    is  
    to  
know  
where  
    are  
you  
going  
to  
go  
    ?  
    and  
what  
    are  
you  
going  
to  
do  
    ?  
with  
    it  
    ?

—Alan Groombridge





2 am.

Icy raindrops continue falling rhythmically,  
Dark clouds engulf the sky,  
Layers of snow melt slowly  
Strong winds blow by, whistling with ease.

My body shivers as the frigid air fills my lungs,  
The smell of melting snow tells me of spring's soon arrival,  
Lights in windows come on all around,  
A flowing stream of water fills the cracks of  
The sidewalk and races to the ditch.

Despite the cold, I begin to grow tired,  
It's time to leave this closing winter carnival,  
I crawl back in bed with a sense of relief,  
And fall asleep to the lullaby of rain.

—Sara Weber

### Irish Cream Coffee

There it is  
The YMCA  
I've been here just  
a little while  
cased it twice  
so far

The blue posters on white  
walls laugh and jeer  
Once I step in I  
become a statistic  
a bum

I am pushed in by those  
in my life  
but repulsed by my mind  
Only the  
destitute go there

I take another sip of  
Irish cream coffee  
Look around and listen  
to the bustle of the Food Court



I must go in, to  
face the truth  
I have been judged  
Unemployed  
the people lock  
me up into mental  
isolation

Before I go  
Another cup of  
Irish cream coffee

—Caleb deBoer

### Porcelain

A tiny hand,  
curled in sleep,  
such a grip on my heart.  
Every twitch  
of the porcelain mouth  
tugs at my heart.  
He speaks not a word  
but his eyes tell  
tales beyond his years.  
Wisdom in those eyes,  
eyes that can see  
deep into the depths of my soul.  
For this tiny one,  
I would give my very life.  
Through so much,  
his brief life  
only beginning.  
This innocence,  
simple love,  
controls me in a way,  
a way no other can.  
For him, anything--  
all for him.  
I'll do what he asks.  
Manipulation  
in a porcelain smile.

—Kathleen Jarvis





## Unshed Wisdom

Picnic table,  
smooth and comfortable  
resting under the great oak  
Oh tree of wisdom, of deliverance  
Why do you not speak?

Laughing voices  
ascend to the silver stars  
they speak, they remember  
the drudging daily routine of life,  
as a singed log to a raging fire.

Picnic table,  
harsh and scuffed  
ignores the whispered song  
of the towering tree,  
Oh mind of ignorance, of harm  
Why do you not learn?

Hushed nerves  
thrive on the melted wood,  
yearning to forget  
the reason of such stillness,  
of thirsty forgetfulness.

Picnic table,  
harsh and scuffed,  
With the shell of unshed blood.

—Cheryl Hoftyzer

## The Gift Shop

is usually my favourite  
part  
of the  
Art Museum

(I feel  
kind of  
bad  
about that  
sometimes)

—Andrea VanderKooij

## Untitled

Of course then you never recognised the details for what they were. Like the time Mom and Dad bought Betsy, the jersey cow, from the Jobseys. Jim and Henny Jobsey had left Betsy with her calf until both bovines were practically the same size. So when Betsy came to live on the farm, she spent the first two weeks bawling. What did you know about the dark rivers of hair beneath the eyes?

You were puzzled by your cousin's crying in the graveyard. From the back of the car you asked why the monthly visits to Beppe had ended.

I must admit, when the pain and terror were yours, you never had any trouble expressing sorrow. Somewhere hidden in the depths of your heart was a great tap that was far too easy to turn on. And with all the tears came a terrible wailing for which you were christened "the fire engine" by the extended family.

Of course now the wailing has ended.

Eventually you notice a lack of emotion. No, not a lack of emotion but an awkwardness. Like the time you told Mom over the phone you loved her and her response was: "Pardon?"

In a dream you were cut by the *kaas schaaf*, a big, ugly, red gouge across the cheek. Mom didn't even care. In a preoccupied oblivion she ignored your pain.

You suspected it was the adolescent thing. "It's natural for teens to confide in their friends."

You suspected it was the Dutch immigrant background pushing aside emotions and persevering. "If you can't ate it you von't need it."

But now Oma had died and you have new suspicions. Mom had been acting more and more like Opa. Dad says things will be different for Mom when Opa eventually dies. And while you listen to the details, the stories, the stories you have heard before, you wonder if Mom ever cries like Betsy.

—Gwenda Hiemstra

## Receiving Everything

Conflict,  
Tossing To and Fro.  
Stability,  
Fleeting Like a Shadow.

Confusion,  
Thundering Inside.  
Fear,  
Coiling Tight.

Hunting  
For A Steadfast  
Place  
Receiving  
Everything in His  
Amazing Grace.

—corina i. maclean

the minstrel







## I've Been Following My Cat Shadow\*

Perched in the rafters  
Of hand-hewn logs  
Shaped with iron claws,  
Shadow sits regally  
Watching all below.

She glides down to  
The couch then onto the  
Floor only pausing to  
Look at me acknowledging  
The game is on.

I scamper after her  
As she hobbles over  
The cold granite floor,  
Her crippled leg striving  
To keep the pace.

Up the steep stairs  
She flies as I  
Trail behind on  
All fours hoping  
To catch her before

She goes under the  
Bed making my arm  
A log she can shape  
With her claws as  
I reach to tag her.

\*title inspired by Cat Stevens

*—Mike Kleinhuis*

## Mind Games

Drink it in, then quickly turn away  
every time, never give  
mustn't shatter the illusion  
Push and Pull.

I want you--go away  
I need you--who me?  
As if.

I need someone--single life's the best  
Let's talk--never be honest though

More games, then one falters,  
quickly recover, in time for  
the other to break down the guard.  
The rules are bent, broken for a few months  
then reinstated  
Now it's not a game  
I think it's real--at least for you.  
It's becoming real for me.  
I just haven't figured out who made that change  
you, me, or him?

—Joni Westerink

## **Eh?**

And why do you call me  
At this strange hour  
Anyway  
As if you have  
Anything left to say  
Already you have said too much  
And jumped the gun  
Anticipating my stop  
“Alright this is where I get off,” I yell

After several more calls  
Any sensible person would have done the same  
Altering my hairdo was too far  
Anything to avoid you I vowed  
Advancing from the other direction  
Adroitly approaching you head bowed  
Assuming an attitude of apprehension  
Aggressively I fail to mention  
Army boots are not my favourite style  
And perhaps it is better if I don't see you  
At least for a while

Aaaaauugh come hither my love one last smile  
Anger is not becoming my precious child  
Escape escape for a while  
And come back when the weather is mild

—Tim Lyon





## **...But Not**

It begins  
Innocent and naive;  
Solitude, but not  
Isolated, however, free.  
Thoughts remembered, figures stored  
Images interact and you listen;  
Mimicking is no longer  
You are your own, but not

Instinct  
Impulse  
Repeat  
Discover  
Interact  
Conscious

Short lived freedom, long remembered.  
Life with others;  
Others are life, but not  
Given life  
Discover life  
Experience life  
Love life  
It leaves  
Suddenly, it all ends

But not  
Isolated, solitude  
But not  
Alone  
It ends, it is finished,  
But not

*—Dan Koopman*

## **Immunization**

sometimes we're so pedantic  
and so stiff and afraid

maybe it's just me but  
please don't be immune to me

have I changed or  
do I just act different

have you changed or  
was it just a passing phase

I don't know why i feel  
this way, then that

but I fear myself and  
where my mind takes me

my eyes hurt from looking  
at you, and I ache

my internal being hurts  
from you looking at me

and you're not asking  
the right questions

and my feeling hurt  
from not seeing you

I want to create a gap  
because you seem so  
immune to me.

—*Rachel VanArragon*

## **Emptiness**

Like my mailbox  
The T.V when it's off  
A violin without strings  
A sock with no foot  
A mug with no tea  
The sky with no sun  
The night with no moon  
A rose with no petals  
A clock with no hands  
A classroom with no one to be taught  
A frame with no picture  
Eyes with no life  
A mouth with no teeth  
A calendar with no days  
A sun-drenched strawberry with no taste.

—*Amanda Wilms*





## The Gentleman of Venice

The sea spits brine  
to smoothe the corners  
of San Marco into arches,  
while beneath their bended  
yawn  
a man sits on the  
geometric square marbled by  
impressionist-schooled pigeons.  
Their sketch chinks stone to  
stone beneath his restless feet.  
A velvet Dali clock droops  
time upon his head,  
his shoulders roof to  
chimney'd brow, and  
sightless eyes lost  
in Mediterranean sight.  
The winking sun glints  
humour off the waves;  
its cosmic eye on twinkled  
azure blue. A sigh of  
laughing, boundless  
breath blows eye to tear  
--the map of Venice in his face--  
the spill picks path  
of age-worn duct.  
His Shylock smile--of mooring poles,  
canal his tongue, a gondola  
--laid claim his bond:  
her pound of flesh, his squandered love.  
He sits in sculpted pose,  
to wait with mirthless age  
for youth; or limping  
to the Bridge of Sighs  
in hope that  
Casanova will return.

—Marcia Elgersma

## McGuire

I step backward so Crazy Man McGuire's words do not spit on my face.

"Are ye hearin' me boy! I'se just like you...young boy...ten years old. Just like you! So leave while ye can...get the hell out!"

McGuire's eyes are brazen blue. I look to see which one of them is the fake one. "Listen boy! I'se full of gumption...guts and marrow, and there I stood staring at them train tracks, ready to leave to Alberta, or Ontario. Them wheels was pumpin' and racin', the steam pipe was whistlin'...I was set to board the train out of this hell!"

The Cape station is empty except for Mrs. Maybird, a lady from our church, who looks up from her knitting and frowns.

Crazy Man isn't finished, "Here people don't get nowhere, you work and die, and marry and drink...I was leaving. I was ten...like you ...and leaving." McGuire's jaw comes loose and his tongue hangs out wolf-like. "You worried about missin' your momma? Missin' her tasty pies and warm bosom? I tell ya, there be lots of warm bosoms in Ontario!"

Momma. Momma gave me ten dollars when she kissed me goodbye at her apartment door. She pointed me to the Halifax station and I ordered my ticket to Cape Breton myself.

"My momma don't live here at the Cape," I say.

Old Man McGuire's eyes say he hasn't heard me. He points one of his fingers into my chest. The nail is yellow and curved and wants cutting. A forgotten styrofoam cup, half filled with coffee, distracts the man and his thin spidery legs wander to investigate.

My stomach squelches inside as I miss Momma. She smells like flowers, and her house like dried apples. She tucks heavy blankets tight around me when I sleep, until I'm "snug as a bug in a rug," she says. She's smart too, and has taught me about justice, and the Charter of Rights and John Diefenbaker.

My hand closes around the handful of bills and change in my pocket. I step to the ticket counter and stretch my neck to peek through the rectangular opening in the window. A pin-striped man sits clipping paper clips together in a long chain.

"When is the next train to Halifax, please? I want to go back." My heart pounds chug-a-luglug, chug-a-luglug like wheels in my chest.

The man snorts and twines the chain around his fingers. "This here's the Greyhound bus station, boy. Trains don't run to Halifax anymore. Next bus in thirty minutes,"

I smooth the bills, deliberating and counting the cost.

"Edison."

My back straightens to attention. That's my father's voice. His presence penetrates every corner of the station. Mrs. Maybird adjusts her hair, the ticket man begins to fill orders. The clock ticks louder and my heart sinks, derailed.

Fluffy Carrie, my father's friend, shakes her head and giggles.

"Hello Daddy," I say. I raise my arm to shake his hand, but his eyes move down my feet; I realize with horror that my shoelace is untied. Father gives no verbal reprimand, but disapproval seeps through my skin and into my bones. I let my arm fall again at my side.

McGuire whoops and cackles. "You're pickled, boy! You're a pickle in a jar!"

Father doesn't seem to hear or see the crazed bum, but nods to my things and moves toward the door. Carrie bends down and kisses me on the cheek--she smells like powder and plastic, and I want to pinch her.

Momma says I should be nice to Carrie, even though she smokes, has feathery hats and painted nails, but Momma's never even met her.





Before leaving I look once around the waiting room. Mrs. Maybird is smiling at my father's grey overcoat back, the ticket man sits with his chin in his hand. McGuire raises left leg, right leg alternately, like teats on a milk cow. One of his eyes shines mischievously, and he points to Carrie and giggles like a woman.

Carrie smiles again her frosted smile, and to my surprise, I flip her the bird. Crazy Man McGuire's chortles and clucks ring in my ears as I follow my father's back out the door.

\* \* \*

I lay my suitcase and knapsack at my feet, and stand unmoving in front of my father's leather-backed armchair. He pauses his smoking and looks questioningly at me. "Well, boy. You're looking fine. Welcome back home...and well, yes...put your bags in your room as you please."

And Father is finished speaking. He raises his cigar to mustached lips, closing his eyes as he draws in his cheeks. Looking closer, I notice the lines, like deep ravines, which carve up his face into puffy sections. There are double or triple lines outlining the bulbous parts of his porous nose. Deep creases shape the bridge between his eyes. I lean in to look at the deep cleft, like the slit of a bum, which separates his chin in two. This is Father.

Anxious that his eyes might open with me still there, I slide one hand around the grip of my travel bag, and close the gaping mouth of my knapsack with the other. I see Father watching through slitted eyes as I leave the leather study.

My room isn't at all like I left it; the bed is made with a woman-white quilt cover, and there are grown-up pictures hanging, of goofy boys with red suspenders, playing baseball. And Carrie is in it.

"Come in, honey. I don't bite." Her voice oozes sweetness. She recrosses her patterned legs and pats the space beside her.

The bed sinks in the middle where Carrie and I sit; there is nowhere to look but in the dresser mirror across the way. You can't help but meet people in mirrors, and my uneasy eyes keep finding her painted ones. I do not think this is pleasant at all, but Carrie's lips spread and open into a high-pitched laugh.

"Edison, honey, you are the most serious, odd little boy I've met. Do you ever smile...or talk?"

Not odd! I peer at the boy in the mirror, my eyes, flecked with green and grey. My mousy hair sticks up in places, but only because it's curly. My mouth is small and straight. I'm not certain what she means me to reply.

"Yes, ma'am," I say. "I can talk and smile both." I take a breath of stale bedroom air, "but please, can I go outside instead?"

Carrie places a red-clawed hand on my hair and rumples it with her fingertips, scratching my scalp slightly. "Sure, shortstuff."

She straightens her suede skirt, picks up her snakeskin purse, and leaves me alone in the mirror.

\* \* \*

The powerful ocean wind whips my face, the smell of dulce and brine fills my nostrils and lungs. I lean into the gale, letting my arms hang loose and pull backwards by the force. My shoes go sloop-sluck, sloop-sluck in the gushy mud, and I wonder what would happen if it was chocolate. Chocolate for meals, snacks and for eternity, I think.

But the Breton chocolate trail is becoming grass and moss under my feet, and rocks push up between the foliage. Momma told me once about a mammoth creature named Seymour who dug out the ocean with his bare hands, pilling up the stones on shore; that's where the rocks are from. Momma tells good stories; she would hold me on her night-gowned lap, even though I'm not so little now, and

tell all sorts of made-up stories of the sea. There was always a funny ending; Seymour got his name from his whale-of-an-eye that made him see so well, clear across the ocean!

I crawl on my knees and hands now because the smooth rocks are so steep and high that I can't walk up them. The angry ocean blasts in rhythm against the sunlit coast, spraying water all over the rocks like salty spit.

As I reach the top of my rock, I see first a frizzy grey head, with a shiny hole in the middle, then a faded blue jacket. I'm not alone here, there was a man sitting out to sea. My feet step extra quiet because I know who it is; McGuire was here. He is filling the little smooth notch in the stone which is my spot; it perfectly fits me and my sack of sandwiches which Momma always made me. From my space in the notch you can see all of the ocean and all of the sky, but still be fit inside, safe, within the rock shape. The mouths of the waves nip my shoeless toes, but no matter how they leap and twist up, the waves only fizz and spatter.

McGuire's grown-up bum hardly fits into my little nick of stone, but he joyously swings his short pant legs above the ocean lick. His mouth puckers out in a tuneless whistle, like he's singing with the wind. Crazy Man turns his head and smiles an open brown-toothed smile at my approach. I sit on my coverall knees beside him.

"Hello, Crazy Man," I say. An amused laugh comes into his right eye and he rests a gnarled palm on my slight shoulders. "Do you want to know where these rocks come from?" I ask.

He does, so I tell him about Seymour, whose gigantic arms with muscles like Samson's dug for so many years, day and night, to carve the bowl of the sea. McGuire listens attentively throughout my tale, giving only a surprised cluck every now and then, so I also tell him about Carrie, and the lipstick on her teeth, and about Father and his tight bow ties which make him angry, and I tell him about Momma and her little pretty house with no food in it, and how she got so angry and tears came when I told her I wanted, needed to stay.

McGuire listens, his ear cocked to me, and his gaze suspended between the foaming green and the crags of rock. His chicken cackle lessens and his busy eyebrows gather. He reaches out his yellow-nailed finger, and gingerly wipes the slaty spit off my face and eyes. And Crazy Man draws from his tattered coat a present.

At first I do not know what McGuire is giving me. It's a square wooden piece, with four rough notches etched in the top corners. The center of the wood block has a small shaft reaching all the way to the bottom. I take the gift in my hands, and wrap my fingers around the carved top, unsure of what it's meant to be.

McGuire places a rough hand under my armpit and lifts me to my feet. He raises my gift to his mouth, and facing into the mighty wind, the ocean, the expanse of the sky, McGuire blows and blows. The whistle sounds four clashing pitches at once and bellows, over miles of air, the sound of the train.

My friend lowers the train whistle and looks at me with exultant face, listening to the silence that follows. A look of joy is on his face that is not crazy at all, and my breath catches in my lungs as I gaze.

Crazy Man again places the whistle in my small palm, and wrapping his mighty hand around the back of my head, draws me to him with a force that presses the whistle into my gut and makes me cry out. McGuire releases me and is gone, and I am left again alone with the ocean, the whistle and me.

—Karen Brink







## Leftovers

Take  
this mess  
from my plate.  
Give me a feast fit  
for a queen:  
fluffy pillows  
of mashed potatoes  
erupting with a lavish  
warm blanket of gravy,  
covering sweet baby carrots.  
Give me  
well-scrubbed  
cauliflower that  
rests  
in a steamy  
bath  
of bubbling sauce, lying  
next to tender meat  
coated  
with fresh-smelling spices.

Take this mess from my plate:  
Give me the lot I deserve, i need.  
“Have a nice day,” you say,  
taking my last ticket and  
rationing out another mess  
to another Raggedy Ann like me.

I think of how tonight you will  
go to your plush suite in the sky,  
a castle fit for a queen, and pick  
at a feast with a silver  
spoon, wrinkling your nose in  
disgust, throwing it in the trash  
to be eaten by dogs.

And I--will wrap my rags around me,  
relishing greasy tatters and  
licking your bones.

—Julia Dam

## Night Class

a neverending game of  
intellectual dodge-ball  
under guns  
and thumbs  
makes me tired  
and wired  
I just don't know what  
you want  
and I'm sure not gonna  
give it to you,  
and no! I don't find it  
fascinating  
so don't look at me for  
answers.  
I'm not a  
stute  
and you're not con  
cise  
I'm just a backwoods  
rube  
who wants to throw a  
bric  
for two hours  
and  
a  
half.

—Andrea VanderKooij

## Tired of...

I have two fingers,  
one in each ear;  
with my teeth I grab  
a glass of whisky,  
tip my head back and swallow;  
elbows raised,  
fingers still in place;  
my arms are chicken wings.  
You're talking,  
I know,  
but I can't hear you  
and soon I'll be asleep.

—Kai Groen





## Danse Macabre

Black trees like  
    charred skeletons dance--  
        burnt marionettes  
    in a sinister wind that  
whistles with haunting timbre  
    an ominous tune.  
    In the twilight  
        of black November  
    they wave grotesquely,  
swaying trance-like,  
    silhouettes against a  
    foreboding sky smeared  
    with charcoal clouds.  
The candle in my window  
    flickers; I watch, again  
    alone. Not a simple whisper  
    in my ear; it is the limbs  
that rattle, clacking;  
    bony digits reach: hungry  
    sticks of skinny beggars.  
Death sticks to blades  
    of grass like clinging  
    grasshoppers, seeps under  
    windows and oozes along walls;  
    thief-like clouds creep and  
    slither to smother the unsuspecting moon.

—Stephanie Cilia

## Elegy

They live in oak coffins  
with fake gold trim:  
places, people circumstances.  
Never a day passes  
that they don't knock on my door, but  
I am no necromancer;  
I can't bring them back from  
    death, from  
    memory  
    to  
    physicality.  
I can see them waving from the shore  
    as I sail, looking back,  
    on a ship of thoughtful fools.

—Kai Groen

## Two People in a Place

Mindi enters the ballroom at Mitch's side. Actually, she walks a step behind him. She wears a long and shapeless black dress with long sleeves. Mitch wears his tailored tuxedo that so immaculately accentuates his broad shoulders and his curved, carved buttocks. His bow-tie is crisp.

"These lights are so bright," says Mindi.

"But don't they make you feel so alive!" breathes Mitch.

As they move further into the glittering room, Mitch quickens his pace, craning his neck and darting his head in every direction to find all the people he knows. A beautiful bird. Mindi lags behind and focuses her stare directly ahead on Mitch's back. She swallows frequently.

"Oh Min," says Mitch as he flies further away, "I just saw Douglas and Baylor and, well, a whole slew of other fellows that I need to touch base with. Do you mind?"

He says more, but his head is turned away from Mindi towards the sparkling people and his words fade as he breezes into the waves of crowd. Mindi retreats and promptly bumps into a shiny lady.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry," says Mindi. "I'm awfully clumsy. Are you all right? I'm terribly sorry."

The lady nods once in haughty annoyance and turns her back. Mindi steps forward but then steps backward and then turns around, unsure of where she should go. She spots a table bearing an enormous punch bowl, and she steps carefully towards it, focusing her gaze directly ahead on the crystal bowl. She is very conscious of the sound of her own footsteps. At the table, she picks up a glass of glistening punch. Her hand trembles as she raises the glass to her unpainted lips.

An outburst of laughter seizes her attention away from the punch bowl. She turns and notices a group of happy people who appear to dominate the activity of the ballroom. The attention of the group is converged on Mitch.

"And so Leno said, 'Where did you learn to make your line of questioning so unanswerable?' And then I said, 'The truth is, Jay, I took lessons from both Benjamin Matlock and Perry Mason.'"

Uproarious laughter. Mindi looks on from behind her punch glass.

"The trick with Jay Leno is, you give him sugar. That's what he wants, even if he knows you're deeper than the icing."

Fierce nods of acknowledgement. Mitch grins and the lights reflect on his teeth. He turns his head to discreetly itch his neck and in doing so, catches a glimpse of Mindi standing by the punch bowl. Craning his neck and raising his arm above the crowd, he beckons obviously to her. A beautiful bird in the shine-reflecting water, in control. His attention then steers immediately back to the happy group, and the convergence of glittering attentions is on him again. Mindi weaves awkwardly through the sequins and sparkles to follow Mitch's summons. At last she finds his back.

"This is my wife," says Mitch, pulling her towards his side. "Min, this is everyone."

Mindi stares directly ahead at the sleeve of Mitch's tuxedo, which is still before her. Mitch still shines upon the faces of the group and his mouth opens to say something more.

"What do you do? Min was it?" asks a female voice from the crowd. Mitch closes his mouth abruptly. Mindi averts her head as though waking from a deep sleep and dream. The voice is speaking to her.

"What do I do? Do you mean for a living?"

"Well, anything actually," the voice laughs.

Mindi stares into nowhere and a long, dead silence falls over the crowd. The bright lights make her look wan. She swallows. And swallows again. "I don't really know. I don't do anything, especially. Nothing in particular. Nothing of importance."

—Jane Hogeterp





## INVISIBLE

Sometimes, as I sit alone,  
I wonder...  
Am I here at all?  
I laugh,  
no one smiles.  
I cry,  
no one weeps.  
All around me,  
people gather happily,  
life is great,  
but not for me.  
I sit alone,  
wishing...  
perhaps foolishly,  
for someone to care,  
to fall in love with ME.  
I bear no hatred,  
I love those who are lucky.  
I just wish...  
I wish they loved me too.  
The Bible and its teachers,  
they all reply,  
Jesus is enough, I need no other friend.  
It may be true,  
but not for me.  
I need someone here,  
someone on earth.  
Someone strong and wise.  
I need to touch,  
that friend...  
before my eyes.

—Kathleen Jarvis

## Salt Water Wells, Stale Loaves

I go to the well  
And look to the bottom  
I see all the pebbles  
I see the grasses  
And decaying leaves  
The water is foul  
Full of tobacco  
Full of salt

I go to the well  
And look to the bottom  
I see all the clothes  
The bras  
The panties  
The water is beautiful  
Full of sex  
Full of salt

I go to the well  
And look to the bottom  
I see the sheets of music  
And the notes of anger  
I hear the water  
Moving swiftly  
Full of hate  
Full of salt

I go to the well  
And look to the bottom  
But I don't find it  
Water so deep  
Water so cold  
Water pure  
And good  
Full of life  
Full

But I walk  
From the well  
Drinking from the salt  
From well to well  
I go  
Eating stale loaves  
To keep me going  
In circles

—Neil Houtman

### **When I Was a Lamb**

“Did you know sheep have tails?”  
I kick my rubber boots against feedbin below,  
shake my head “no”; I follow  
the Bunyan hand as it reaches for redhot vice.





His oily fist clenches four hoofed legs.  
Upended between coverall thighs  
the lamb is still; glassy eyes blink, bemused.  
Searing clamp closes around matted wool.

Acrid smoke of burning flesh  
enters my nostrils and chokes.  
Like fetid, wet firelogs, a sizzle,  
a dull thud, through serried bone.

Then the shortened lamb is righted  
and with wriggly behind skitters to friends.  
Mr. Coe glances up; I gulp at his words,  
“Who cut off your tail, boy?”

—Karen Brink

### Brotherly Love

My vision has turned red  
Blood red it seems  
I attempt to dry  
my face  
but my kleenex dissolves  
in all the blood  
I am not bleeding  
for I feel no pain at all  
some joy maybe  
I don't know why I'm smiling  
just am  
Usually a lifeless body  
in front of me would be horror  
especially  
ones whose wrists have been slit  
still pumping I notice  
I shrug  
put down the knife  
wash my hands  
and go upstairs

—Caleb deboer

## Lost in the Valley

I thought only guys  
were afraid to look at maps.

I haven't taken mine out in  
a really long time now,  
and I'm thoroughly lost,  
I'm sure.

But I'm also sure  
that when I give in  
and give up  
and unfold the map again--  
it will tell me exactly  
how to get home.

—*Jeannette Sandink*

## Buried Thoughts

An image stirs up memories,  
Fragments of the past  
Rise to the surface  
A puzzle of pieces  
That don't quite fit.  
Reality blurs,  
Details fade.  
Thoughts teeter on the edge  
A tiny shove,  
A slight distraction,  
And it's lost.  
Slipping through the fingers of the mind,  
Falling into the pit of subconscious.

—*Caroline Kralt*







## Sins of Omission

A gold mine,  
undiscovered  
by the one  
to whom it belongs.

The riches unused,  
wealth under cover  
under rock  
hard as flesh;

A crime equal to theft.

(yet it is simple to hide  
sins of omission)

—Jeannette Sandink

## Satellite on the Schoolyard

Playground, soccer field, set of swings  
and jungle gym -- see in them  
the swarming, spinning orbitings  
(the atonal music of the spheres)  
of children spread across their course.

Uncharted corner of the space,  
a sodden patch of grass where fences  
meet, chainlink clawing weeds  
and dirt -- see in that  
the drifting motion of a boy.

He is who I was, light years ago,  
a world a sun away.  
When a larger body, brawling in sun-baked,  
dirt-caked jeans and musclebound shirt  
would near my atmosphere, I would rise

with a tremor in my core, pulled closer  
by reputation's gravity.  
Our eyes would meet like poles opposed --  
north and south -- and, pull and push,  
I fled repulsed through hollow holes of dark

where no voice called, no light enthralled,  
no movement passed my desert path.  
I once approached the glowing blaze  
of a stardust girl, only to be met by  
her nebulous laughter, a supernova of contempt,

leaving me to fly again, among  
the glaring clustered bodies, my blushing  
fiery face burned and scorned, my body  
withered in its soot, streaking like a comet  
with its tail between its legs.

He is who I am and he is not. A glow  
exudes, his atmosphere is warm  
and breatheable. A dimpled crescent beams  
in the contours of his globe. He brushes  
the dirt from his knees and mounts the swing again.

I recall rough weather. Typhoon, cyclone,  
the seasons of my skies were all monsoon  
and water doused the glowing. Toxins  
bobbed about my air, creatures suffered there,  
and bitter winters blighted flora's growth.

I watch his revolutions, his rings  
of smiling round and round the trees,  
round the battered athletes' scuffed up knees,  
a light beneath his bruises. I recall  
lying there, lowering my head

into the coming laughter, and wonder.  
Which secret mines yield such ore  
of gleaming underneath? Does the core  
bubble, does some star stare at him with love,  
or is this all a trick of light and shade?

He is who I was, but he will never follow  
my vacant trails across this sky.  
When I observe a huddled gang  
of children, hear their bright tones of joy,  
squeals, shrieks, their crashing accusations --

when I walk the streets at lunchtime,  
downtown, look in storefronts, or talk  
to haggling bums at busstops --  
when I phone a friend, share a taxi  
with a stranger, when I see a crowd --





I merely see a galaxy of single  
orbits unrelated, tracing paths  
across the sky, across the street, across the city  
toward inconclusive ends,  
in circles around the same dying sun.

We are all one another's Plutos,  
tiny chunks of rock and ice so cold  
and far away that to him my sun  
appears no brighter, no warmer, than a match  
just past arm's length, unreachable.

On the schoolyard our hellos  
are pindrops on a planet's surface  
a billion miles away, our study groups  
are stars colliding, parties are the mass  
inhaled into a gaping black hole.

At a desk alone, a book before me,  
enveloped in an atmosphere of heat and light  
which calmly shields me from  
the nebulae and solar winds  
beyond the clouds, I'm a healthy planet.

Thus I watch this image of myself, my twin  
world, the world I once was, bounding  
on the playground. Separated by a universe  
of matter, each unreachable to the other,  
we are close as any two.

—David Lehr

### Song

Blackness falls, tension builds,  
hush sweeps across the room.  
All is silent,  
focussed, anticipating.  
Light streams on a lone figure,  
her eyes closed, body swaying,  
while soft melodies whisper  
and encircle wholly.  
Lips part, breath swells  
and the soul overwhelms  
and bursts...  
into song.

—Julia Dam

## Outsider

Montage of withered bent skeleton frames  
draped in striped dirty faded cloths  
which seem to hold up the starved bodies.  
Grime clogs up every last suffocating pore,  
parched lips pursed tight, laughterless.  
The man in back glances outside sight,  
smugly bears his clean shaven creamy pus.  
Under his rags this man is an outcast.  
White shirt and pristine Oxford tie.  
He is so unfamiliar the others can't see him.  
Sunken dark sockets surround dry eyes  
that look through their world of hate.  
They stand like cattle waiting for slaughter,  
waiting to be ordered or beaten senseless.

—Caleb deBoer

## Sour Grapes

When I spoke to Annie last  
my head went numb--  
that is what happens,  
(I think)  
when years of faith  
melt  
like  
wax without wicks,  
a stench heavy, thick  
like incense, nothing left but  
ashes at my feet and  
on my forehead,  
gritty on my shaking fingers.  
Take of this body, drink  
Christ with a cork, she said;  
How can you believe it's Him  
When all you taste is sour grapes?

—Stephanie Cilia



